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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 002058

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: LTTE STRIKES AGAIN IN THE NORTH, SITUATION TENSE
AND CONFUSED IN THE EAST

REF: A. COLOMBO 2040

[1](#)B. USDAO COLOMBO IIR 6 816 0022 06

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle. Reasons 1.4 (B&D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Tensions remain high in the North and East of Sri Lanka following a second Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attack on December 6 that killed seven in Jaffna, and the murder of two Muslim fishermen in Ampara also blamed on the LTTE. New Army Commander Fonseka told a press conference on December 6 that the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) will stand firm against terrorism without rising to the LTTE's bait. The American demining contractor has suspended field operations in Jaffna, but continues to train the SLA. The LTTE claims to have killed a senior leader of the breakaway Karuna faction and blames the anti-LTTE para-militaries for the attacks on eastern Muslims, producing two putative Karuna prisoners to prove it. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Just two days after a similar attack (Ref A), on December 6, the LTTE killed 7 soldiers in a second command detonated claymore attack in Irupalai, on the Jaffna - Point Pedro Road. An SUV belonging to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (local press had incorrectly identified them as diplomats) had just passed when the bomb exploded, destroying the Army vehicle and lightly damaging the SUV. Surviving soldiers ordered the Swiss aid workers out of the SUV and told the driver to transport two wounded soldiers to an Army aid center.

[1](#)3. (SBU) This claymore attack coincides with LTGEN Sarath Fonseka's assumption of duties as Army Commander on December [1](#)6. An experienced field and combat commander, Fonseka has many years of experience in Jaffna. The new Army chief told the press that the LTTE cannot provoke the Army into starting a war, and has called for field level talks between the SLA and the LTTE to defuse the tense situation. The SLA is responding to these attacks by increasing the number and frequency of patrols rather than staying in their fortified positions or taking their frustrations out on bystanders (Ref B).

[1](#)4. (C) Three AmCits from RONCO, part of the Department's Humanitarian Demining Program under PM/WRA, currently reside in Jaffna. Although field demining operations have been suspended, training within the Palali high security zone (HSZ) continues. RONCO is coordinating closely with the SLA to assess the situation, and the civilian trainers can stay within the SLA HSZ if it is too dangerous to travel.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The LTTE propaganda website Tamilnet reported that in Ampara district on December 6, LTTE cadres ambushed a patrol from the breakaway Karuna faction, killing four and capturing two. The site also claimed that "Barathy", a key Karuna faction leader, was among the dead. Furthermore, the site claimed that the captives confessed to the November 18 grenade attack on the Akkaraipattu mosque and to other anti-Muslim killings in Ampara district (Ref A). (NOTE: These confessions were likely obtained by torture. End note.)

[1](#)6. (SBU) On December 6, the towns of Muttur in Trincomalee district and Kalmunai in Ampara District were under a hartal (general strike) after two Muslim fishermen were found machine gunned to death in Ampara district. Members of the Muslim community, along with police, suspect the LTTE of killing the fishermen. Muslim crowds are reportedly enforcing the hartal by throwing stones at vehicles and pedestrians that dare to pass by.

[1](#)7. (C) COMMENT: The death toll has climbed to 17 soldiers, the highest for the SLA since the cease-fire, in less than a week. This increases pressure on the new government and the SLA commander. LTGEN Fonseka has proven his cool under fire, but it is unclear if the foot soldiers will continue to remain equally disciplined.

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